



SOCIAL SECURITY

The Commissioner

November 28, 2007

The Honorable Stevan Pearce
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Pearce:

Thank you for your letter of October 9, 2007 in which you forwarded City Councilman Jeff Diamond's, petition regarding the Carlsbad Social Security office. I appreciate the concern you have for your constituents, and assure you we are committed to providing Social Security services to the residents of Carlsbad. I also appreciated your staff's time in meeting with us in recent months to discuss the Carlsbad office. We greatly appreciated hearing your concerns, and are already taking steps to address some of these issues presented. In addition, we have decided to defer any final decision on changes to the operation of the Carlsbad office until January 2008.

In response to concerns about the physical space of the current Carlsbad office, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has initiated an expedited project with the General Services Administration to obtain new and more accessible space to serve public visitors. The current office's reception area includes seating for only eight people, which means that, sometimes, visitors must wait in the hall outside the office. The new space will include a reception area with more seating. As I mentioned earlier, we will not make a final decision on hours of operation until January 2008. In the interim, to better assess the workload volume of the Carlsbad office, SSA will initiate additional surveys to identify the number of residents who are seeking services at nearby SSA offices (and why), and to identify the types of SSA services requested by visitors to the Carlsbad office. This information will allow us to ensure that we are able to provide an appropriate level of service in Carlsbad.

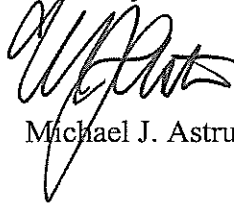
Please rest assured that we will continue to consider your concerns and the concerns of others, and review all options. Our goal is to wisely use our limited resources while providing service to the Carlsbad community.

Of course, it is not possible to separate this discussion of SSA's field office presence from a discussion of Agency funding. As you may know the FY 2008 Labor/HHS appropriations bill, passed by the House and Senate, included \$275 million above the President's budget for SSA. With these additional resources, SSA could keep up with projected increases in disability applications, set the stage for a substantial increase in the number of disability hearings SSA can process beginning in 2009, and have the flexibility to replace some of the front-line staff vacancies expected to occur in FY 2008. This level of funding would keep SSA almost even with FY 2007 resource levels, after accounting for mandatory cost increases and increased levels of mandatory program integrity work. Although the additional funding, if received, is much needed and appreciated, it would not allow us to keep up with our expanding workloads.

In the meantime, SSA will continue operating under a continuing resolution at the FY 2007 funding level. If we have to operate at the FY 2007 level of funding for all of FY 2008, we will be looking at potential furloughs and other unattractive options.

I appreciate your support of SSA's programs and I look forward to your continued support of our FY 2008 appropriation. I hope this information is helpful. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Ms. Margaret Hostetler, SSA's Deputy Commissioner for Legislation and Congressional Affairs, at (202) 358-6030.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Astrue", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael J. Astrue

cc: City Councilman Jeff Diamond